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Briefing memo

IGC - Mr. Carter
I/R - Mr. Lubin
IAL - Mr. McKnight
ARA/P - Richard G. Cushing

March 23, 1960

Background on broadcasting to Cuba

The following, in slightly different form, was pulled together for Mr. Herter's information. It might be useful to you for letters and other purposes.

BROADCASTING TO CUBA

The Voice of America began one-hour broadcasts in Spanish on short-wave to Latin America on Monday, March 21. This, in effect, was a resumption of VOA Spanish-language broadcasting to the area, since such programming was suspended several years ago in USIA's reapportionment of funds and readjustment of priorities.

These broadcasts, consisting of news, commentary, interviews, features and some popular music, are beamed from five powerful VOA transmitters in the United States, and early reports indicate fair to good reception on most of the five frequencies used.

The new VOA broadcasts supplement the 2-1/2 hours in English broadcast nightly by VOA and the programs in Spanish and Portuguese which are packaged in Washington for placement on local stations. In addition, WRUL in Boston broadcasts a half hour in Spanish on short wave each night.

VOA short wave transmissions, while not aggressively anti-Castro, carry important U. S. statements and editorials bearing on the Cuban situation. Thus, while conserving credibility, they get our point across in an official, dignified way. There is some feeling that the Cubans are weary of harangues on radio and welcome a calm, dispassionate exposition of our point of view.

The U. S. Information Agency, which operates VOA, is aware at the same time that short wave is relatively low in impact, however, and has begun studies to determine what can be done to beam a strong medium wave signal into Cuba. VOA would label such programming as intended for listeners throughout the Caribbean area.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CSS/IR

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TS AUTH.

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2

No medium wave station now operating in the United States has a sufficiently strong signal to reach Cuba without considerable fading. A further difficulty in beaming medium wave broadcasts into Cuba is the great number (80) of radio stations now crowding the standard dial in Cuba. There are 32 stations in Habana alone.

While some thought is being given to increasing the power of a station, say in Miami or Key West, the VOA is inclined to believe the only solution might be to build, at high priority, a transmitter or perhaps 500 kilowatts in the Key West area. Before this is done, however, it must be determined whether such powerful transmissions would interfere with domestic U. S. broadcasting.

USIA has considered bringing the USS Courier, which broadcasts in both short and medium wave, from the Mediterranean, but feels at this time it cannot pull out a rather effective radio operation from the Middle East.

Use of the USS Courier, a broadcasting airplane, or even of a special transmitter mounted at Key West would, of course, leave the United States open to charges of increased psychological warfare against Cuba and thereby prejudice what USIS informational programs are still going within Cuba. USIA still has enough of a program under way in Cuba to warrant holding off on any immediate medium wave broadcasting which could be challenged as aggression. Thus, its plan for a transmitter complex in Key West are, at this time, on the basis of proceeding only if it looks as if USIS will be forced to close in Cuba. Even the start of construction on a large Florida transmitter, it is feared, would be enough to enable the GOC to eject USIS from Cuba; such construction, requiring considerable Florida labor, would be next to impossible to keep from the Cubans.

Senator Allott can be assured that the U. S. Information Agency and the Department are entirely in accord (with him) as to the need to get more factual information about United States policy positions to the people of Cuba, but are aware that informational and cultural programs still being carried out by the USIS in Cuba would be jeopardized should we engage in any hard-hitting programs in Spanish on medium wave beamed from a nearby point. Instead, it is hoped that as long as USIS is able to operate in Cuba, it can increase its activities to make the United States viewpoint known to the people through its varied programs, and rely on medium wave radio only when all else fails. Meantime, the short wave programming of the VOA will have some effect in reaching people who, we are given to believe, will seek out the truth.

ARA/P - RGCushing:bcs.-3/25/60..

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